

Towns of Swainton and Clermont
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
U.S. Highway 9, South of State Road 83
Swainton
Cape May County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1050

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NJ
5-SWAIN,
1-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington , D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWNS OF SWANTON AND CLERMONT

HABS No. NJ-1050

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Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, U.S. Highway 9, South of State Road 83, Swanton, Cape May County, New Jersey.

Significance: Swanton and Clermont are representative of the early eighteenth-century bay towns which grew up along Shore Road, the main transportation artery prior to the railroad.

History: Swanton is an inland community which, today, appears to have no definite boundaries. It begins around the northern edge of Cape May Courthouse and runs north along Route 9 for several miles. Originally, Swanton and the neighborhood later called Clermont were together referred to as "Townsend's Inlet." The post office for this area was established in 1849, and operated under that name until 1896. As "Townsend's Inlet" also described a portion of Seven Mile Beach, and the inlet itself, it was eventually dropped. At one time Swanton was also referred to as "Oceanville." Clermont was named when it was given its own post office in 1886. Though never more than a small community, Clermont did have a grist mill and a sawmill, which together treated the grains and lumber produced locally. Later, residents profited from the seashore tourist trade. The Hotel Clermont received visitors who were taxied by stagecoach from the railroad station in South Seaville.¹

Swanton was named for the Swain family, who owned land in the area. The Asbury Methodist Church was established in 1812, and the present structure was erected in 1852. It stands on the west side of Route 9, surrounded by a small graveyard.² Additional cemeteries are located on Route 9 between Avalon Boulevard and Cape May Courthouse. Two slave cemeteries are also said to remain in the area, though not very well preserved.³

Today, only roadside signs designate community boundaries. Route 9 is scattered with a variety of businesses, including Martindale's automotive and Clinton Conover Farms, the South Jersey Gas Company and "country" antique stores. Little effort has been made to create a unified commercial district, though numerous nineteenth-century homes and undeveloped land prevent this area from becoming a "strip." While the little settlement of Clermont boasts at least three car dealerships, the Clermont Business Park consists of a single vacant building in a bare field. The residents of Ravenwood, a development of single family homes just outside Clermont, and those who inhabit the trailers in the center of "town," must rely on nearby Seaville for shopping. Besides serving motorists interested in purchasing local

¹ George F. Boyer and J. Peason Cunningham, Cape May County Story (Avalon: Avalon Publishing Co., 1975), 88, 136.

² Wendeline Moore, "Recollections of Old Swanton," The Cape May County Magazine of History and Genealogy 8 (1981), 42; William McMahon, South Jersey Towns: History and Legend (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973), 155.

³ Moore, 44.

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antiques and produce, the communities offer specialty services to Avalon and the other barrier island towns.

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HABS Historian
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- Sources: Boyer, George F., and Cunningham, J. Pearson. Cape May County Story. Avalon: Avalon Publishing Co., 1975.
- William McMahon. South Jersey Towns: History and Legend. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973.
- Moore, Wendeline. "Recollections of Old Swainton." The Cape May County Magazine of History and Genealogy. 8 (1981): 42.
- Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior, 1991.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatza (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.